

Working It Out: Learning to Negotiate with Your Teenager

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Checkpoints for Successful Negotiation

- Communicate clearly
- Respect the other person
- Recognize and clearly define the problem
- Seek solutions from a variety of sources
- Collaborate to reach a mutual solution
- Be reliable
- Preserve the relationship

Negotiation is a Process

Negotiation is one of several ways to resolve conflict. It can be used when parent and teenager have taken a position on an issue. Negotiation is the process by which conflict can be resolved so that both parent and teenager feel like they have achieved a solution.

Problem-solving negotiation is:

- Listening and understanding
- Having concern for the relationship
- Satisfying the interests of both sides
- Inventing new options
- Reaching an agreement based on fairness.

Common areas for negotiation with teenagers are:

- Money
- Grades
- Transportation
- Recreation
- Convenience
- Clothing
- Chores
- Social manners

Topics included in negotiation are chosen based on a child's skill level and maturity level. The frequency of negotiation increases as a child grows older. During late adolescence almost all rules may be negotiated, with the parent maintaining a few rules that won't be negotiated. The teen is trying to break the walls to independence and may push against some of these rules.

Communication is Key

The key to effective negotiation is clear communication. Communication involves three important skills: *speaking, listening and understanding*. Negotiation doesn't work using just one of these skills. For example, you can't have good understanding without good listening and speaking. Negotiation is most effective when both parent and teenager are able to clearly identify and discuss their sources of disagreement and misunderstanding.

When you assume that you know what someone is going to say before he says it, you increase the chances of misunderstanding what he really does say.

Effective negotiation is a two-way process that encourages both sides to participate in making decisions. It also provides a way for parent and teenager to learn to understand each other better and to grow in their relationship. Negotiation helps create a healthy balance between giving and getting. Everyone becomes a winner through negotiation.

Rethink the Conflict

Rethink is one good way to remember how to approach conflict and to begin negotiating.

R -- Recognize when you're angry. Learn to help yourself relax.

Rethink it:

What are my body's anger signals? Do I experience increased heart rate, muscle tension, upset stomach, headache? What other feelings am I having that my anger may be hiding? Do I feel hurt, stressed, embarrassed, scared?

What can I do to help myself cool down?

Rethink it:

- Step back and take a deep breath before reacting.
- Tell yourself things like, "It's OK. Take it easy. I can handle this."
- Count to 10.
- If necessary, take a break, walk away, listen to music, chill out in your own way, *then* deal with things.

E -- Explain the situation from the *other* person's point of view; empathize.

Parent rethinks it:

What is my teenager thinking? Feeling?

When I was a teenager, did I ever feel that way?

If I was in my teenager's shoes, how would I react?

What else might be going on in his/her life that may be contributing to the problem?

Teen rethinks it:

What is my parent thinking? Feeling?

If I was a parent, how would I feel?

What would I do if I was a parent in this situation?

What else is happening in Mom's or Dad's life that makes this problem difficult?

T -- Think about how *you* may be contributing to the problem.

Rethink it:

Can I look at this situation in a different way? Can I find some humor in it?

What am I thinking about when I'm angry? Are my thoughts feeding my anger?

What else is happening in my life that might be contributing to the problem?

Is this a battle worth fighting, or should I let this one slide?

H -- Hear, really hear, what the other person is saying. Listen to the feelings as well as the words.

Rethink it:

How can I be sure I understand how the other person feels and *show* that I do?

- Give the person your full attention, lean forward, make eye contact and don't interrupt.
- Test how well you understand the other person's point of view by putting his/her ideas into your own words, asking questions as necessary.

- Listen for the emotions, not just the thoughts. Say, "I can tell you feel..."

I -- Include "I" statements. Use sentences that begin with "I feel... when..." to explain how you feel.

Rethink it:

How might stating my feelings help a situation?
How would a sentence that starts with "You..." make someone feel?

N -- Negotiate to try to work things out to everyone's satisfaction.

Rethink it:

Have I considered how I may have helped create the problem? What might I do to help fix things?
What can I reasonably ask of the other person to help the situation?
How can I figure out a solution or compromise?

Steps of negotiation:

- Explain your position as calmly and simply as possible.
- Listen, and be sure you understand the other person's point of view.
- Don't make demands, lecture or bring up old grudges.
- Suggest and discuss some options you can both live with.
- If all else fails, take a break or agree to disagree.

K -- Show kindness even when expressing anger. You can get something off your chest without trying to hurt the other person.

Rethink it:

Can I say something positive about the person or the situation along with my negative feelings?
Is my tone of voice calm?
Am I avoiding sarcasm and put-downs?
Can I use a sense of humor to lighten a tense moment?
Am I keeping in mind any outside issues that may be affecting how we're both feeling?
Am I focusing my comments on the problem and not the person?

What Parents Need to Know to Negotiate with a Teenager

Place and time considerations

The negotiation process will be most effective when both parent and teenager take time to think through what they will say. When possible, plan ahead to meet at a place and time convenient to everyone. A quiet, neutral spot where there are few distractions or interruptions is best for open discussion.

Teenager's development considerations

Recognize the changes a teenager is experiencing with social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. These changes may appear as a teenager strives for independence, experiences hormonal changes and develops thought processes. Understanding the general characteristics of development for each age helps parents effectively negotiate with their teenager.

Additional Resources

- Understanding and Working with Youth (HE-484), a publication free from any county office of the NDSU Extension Service
- Parent Line, an information and listening support warmline for North Dakota parents, 1-800-258-0808 (231-7923 in Fargo)
- HELP-LINE, North Dakota's free 24-hour crisis intervention, information and mediator/counselor referral service, 1-800-472-2911
- Other adolescent and youth development educational resources from any county office of the NDSU Extension Service.

References

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